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What's in a game?



The game of Mow - no flies on you! (swissinfo)

Your task is to round up a herd of cows, carefully avoiding the ones surrounded by the most flies. A simple premise, a catchy design, and hey presto a game is born.

Mow, the card game about cows, was one of five new Swiss games launched recently in the Museum of Games near Vevey on Lake Geneva.

From the worthy to the absurd, the games are meant to be played by all ages in Switzerland and further afield. swissinfo went along to roll the dice.

Let's begin with the most earnest endeavour – the game of Helvetiq. What was the name of the Swiss army corps set up in 1941? Pass. What was the real name of famous Swiss architect Le Corbusier? Pass. What on earth are these questions doing in a game? Read on.

The brainchild of three engineers, Helvetiq was inspired by the experience of one of the three, Hadi Barkat, when he was going through the Swiss naturalisation process.

Snowed under by the reams of Swiss trivia he had to learn and baffled by the complexities of the Swiss political system, Barkat decided there had to be an easier way. Enter Gameworks, a Vevey-based games company, which developed the mechanics of the game and ultimately split it into two parts – a quiz and a political strategy game.

Board appeal

Orders for Helvetiq are already flowing in from officialdom and different towns can order tailor-made packs of questions. This game could appear in your welcome pack if you move to a new commune, something to keep the family occupied on a rainy day.

Though it seems Swiss specific, the concept of this game has broader appeal, according to Nils Rinaldi, one of its creators, and it can even be adapted for use in corporate settings.

"Of course the name Helvetiq would change but we already have two countries which are interested in modifying the game – Belgium and Canada. The mechanics of the game would remain the same but the illustrations and questions would be different."

From child's play to children's rights, the colourful new board game Kimaloé is an unusual means of communicating harsh realities. Suitable for age eight and over, the game was commissioned by the Swiss charity Terre des Hommes, developed by GameWorks, and can be played in four languages.

Each player takes on the cause of a child and has to secure for them the rights they are missing, while making progress with their pawns on the board. The stories of the children are written separately and can be revealed at the end of the game, introducing the educational element.



Kimaloé makes child play of children's rights (swissinfo)

Defining fun

Despite the vast array of computer and video games available, traditional board and card games still manage to attract new players. The social interaction and fun that they provide is unique.

So how can the person who is choosing a game this Christmas recognise a good one? There's no straight answer to that question as Sébastien Pauchon of GameWorks explained.

"I think that the perfect game is just the game that suits all the people around the table at that given time."

"Some people are into word games, others definitely want big strategic games, while some don't want to have more than two rules, they just want to have fun. The main thing is for the players to be happy and have had a good evening together," Pauchon said.

swissinfo, Clare O'Dea in La Tour-de-Peilz

NEW GAMES

Another Swiss game of speed new to the market is Zoff am Herd, literally Trouble at the Stove. In this card game players take on the role of cook and have to assemble the ingredients for a soup, as pictured on the cards.

With one person playing the chef, the other participants have to scurry around following orders, cooking up a storm and trying not to miss their turn.

Hurry Cup, edited by Hurrigan, is a classic road race board game set in Cannes in 1925.

CONTEXT

Terre des Hommes, which commissioned the game Kimaloé, has three areas of expertise: health, social care, and the rights of the child.

It has development projects in 28 countries and emergency relief programmes in three others.

The Swiss Games Museum is housed in the castle of La Tour-de-Peilz, near Vevey on the shores of Lake Geneva.

The museum also holds temporary exhibitions: the current exhibition features games of the 18th and 19th centuries, a turning point in European game culture. The exhibition runs until February 22.

LINKS

- Kimaloé (Gameworks) (<http://www.gameworks.ch/en/index.html>)
- Helvetiq (<http://www.helvetiq.ch/>)
- Hurry Cup and Mow (HurriganGames) (<http://hurricangames.com/>)
- Zoff am Herd (<http://www.zoffamherd.info/>)
- Swiss Museum of Games (<http://www.museedujeu.com/site/index.php?lang=english>)
- Terre des Hommes (<http://www.tdh-geneve.ch/www/index.php?lang=en&page=main>)

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